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## Renaissance or Afterlife? Nostalgia in the New Jazz Films<sup>i</sup>

Jazz films are rather like the proverbial omnibus. Fifteen years passed between Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999) and Damien Chazelle's *Whiplash* (2014), so fans of the genre may well have given up by that time. Furthermore, the former had a relatively low profile and the latter is in many ways quite untypical of the genre so that its identity as a jazz film has been questioned. The demise of the genre could hardly have come as a surprise, given the dramatic decline in popularity and mass appeal of the music itself and the competition from slickly produced television documentaries, such as Ken Burns's *Jazz* (PBS, 2001). Nevertheless, *Whiplash* was followed by *Miles Ahead* (Don Cheadle, 2015), *Born to be Blue* (Robert Budreau, 2015) and *La La Land* (2016, Chazelle again) in quick succession, and others may well follow.<sup>ii</sup>

It would seem that, as in so many cases when an art form's demise has been diagnosed (think of opera, the novel or painting), there is more life in the old dog yet. In this context, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the apparent revival of the jazz film was preceded by a wave of successful popular music biopics, including *Ray* (Taylor Hackford, 2004) on Ray Charles, *Walk the Line* (James Mangold, 2005) on Johnny Cash and *La Vie en rose* (*La môme*, Olivier Dahan, 2007) on Edith Piaf (Inglis 2007), so it could be argued that the recent series of jazz films is an epiphenomenon of the wider popularity of pop music biopics.

Appearances can be deceptive, though, and I will be arguing in this chapter that what we are witnessing is not so much the renaissance of the jazz film but its afterlife. Although it would be problematic to establish a straightforward parallel between the fortunes of jazz films and the music they depict, I contend that its cinematic representations tell us a lot about dominant cultural perceptions of jazz.

I will focus predominantly on *Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue*, since both are more characteristic of the established conventions of the jazz film. By comparison, despite his evident love of and interest in jazz, Chazelle's offerings are rather more unusual (but hardly less interesting or

enjoyable). *Whiplash* is set in a conservatory, which links it more closely to the rite of passage movie. Furthermore, while the conflict between obsessive devotion to one's art on one hand and love or anything resembling ordinary life on the other is not untypical of jazz films, the way it is enacted, with the protagonist Andrew (Miles Teller) falling under the spell of his professor, the charismatic bully Fletcher (J K Simmons), is weirdly more reminiscent an army or sports movie. Nicholas Pillai (2015, 6; 2017) makes an interesting comparison with Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, arguing that the film should be viewed as part of 'a tradition of expressionistic cinema devoted to male obsession' (and, perhaps less persuasively, as a horror film). More problematically, the film's depiction of jazz is lopsided: the students at the fictional Shaffer Conservatory undergo a rigorous military drill, entirely focused on technical facility, flawless execution and precision, enforced through cut-throat competition. Although these values are important in jazz, they are typically subservient to expressivity and originality, about which the film has nothing to say (cf. Brody 2014).<sup>iii</sup> Whatever one may want to say about jazz education, it almost invariably involves improvisation, which likewise is entirely absent in the movie. The climate depicted in the film would, if anything, be a more recognisable – if still caricatured – depiction of classical music training. *La La Land*, for its part, is a musical, directly alluding to the golden age musical, so its generic concerns are somewhat different if related.

#### The New Jazz Films and their Old Models

*Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue* are almost uncannily similar in many respects. Both are biopics on revered trumpeters, Miles Davis and Chet Baker respectively, who were almost exact contemporaries. Indeed, Miles plays a small but crucial role in *Born to be Blue*, earning him the distinction of having been revived cinematically twice in one year. Both are 'neoclassical biopics', according to Dennis Bingham's (2010, 17–18) categorization, in that they combine aspects of earlier phases, although both veer strongly in the direction of the 'warts-and-all' biopic, with *Miles Ahead*

displaying a simultaneous tendency for the 'classical, celebratory' form (mostly, although not entirely, avoided in *Born to be Blue*). Crucially, both home in on a moment of crisis in their protagonists' lives, when they were unable to perform and had to painstakingly relearn to play their instruments (although that phase is mostly elided in *Miles Ahead*), and proceed to fill in much of the backstory with flashbacks. Although the condensation in the two films is probably unusual, this prominent use of flashbacks is not unconventional in biopics as such, where, despite popular beliefs to the contrary, the seemingly conventional cradle-to-grave narrative is more the exception than the rule (Vidal 2014, 2; see also Custen 1992; Bingham 2010). Moreover, as I will argue, the way flashbacks are used enhances the nostalgic effect of both movies. In the process, both also 'embellish' the biographical facts with fictional elements (some more excusable than others). Further, true to the jazz film tradition, both are rather revelling in the graphic depiction of the destruction and misery wrought by drugs and the attendant crime. To be sure, these unsavoury aspects were central to the lives of the characters depicted (and *Born to be Blue*, in particular, could actually be accused of sugar-coating the extremes to which Baker went), but it is telling to what extent filmmakers have been drawn time and again to the most notorious figures in the tradition, thereby contributing to somewhat dated stereotypes about jazz. This is not to deny the prevalence of alcohol and drug addiction during particular periods of jazz such as the 1950s and 60s, but it is noteworthy that there are no biopics of level-headed, sane figures, such as Dizzie Gillespie, Dave Brubeck or, for that matter, Louise Armstrong or Duke Ellington (both hardly a strangers to the silver screen but never the subjects of biopics properly speaking).

Julie F. Codell (2014, 159–60) has analysed how in biopics of visual artists

abjection must be accounted for and ultimately erased to validate the production by such artists of "great" works that represent the high culture proudly claimed by their respective societies and nations. ... [These films] have erased, exaggerated, or invented biographical content to naturalize abjection as the essence of the artist's character and define the artist's

function as cultural scapegoat. ... Eminent artists creating famous works permit spectators to partake of this “magic” moment that obscures contradictions between the posthumous idealization of artists in cultural memory and their seemingly innate marginalized, dirty, immoral, and self-destructive abject selves.

Much the same happens in jazz films from the seminal *Young Man with a Horn* (Michael Curtiz, 1950) onwards: over and above its undeniable reality, what Codell calls ‘abjection’ – in our case variously drugs, alcohol, crime, poverty, racial discrimination, violence and sexual promiscuity – is emphasized and stylized as the condition of genuine creativity and genius. According to these narratives, the jazz musician has to live outside the norms of society in order to deliver what that society truly needs. Writing about traditional ethnographic methods (rather than film per se), Ingrid Monson (2009, 6) has drawn attention to the way in which what could be viewed as the depiction of bohemianism merges with common stereotypes about African-Americans, speaking of the ‘voyeuristic quality of the outside gaze that emphasizes the social transgressions of musicians (especially sex and drug-related ones) at the expense of their broader and frequently more humane humanity’ (even where, as in *Young Man with a Horn*, the musicians portrayed are white, their representation is informed by popular perceptions of jazz as a music and culture associated with blacks).

After the showbiz biopics from the tail end of the swing era (before jazz became commonly viewed as an art form rather than entertainment), such as *The Fabulous Dorseys* (Alfred E. Green, 1947), *The Glenn Miller Story* (Anthony Mann, 1954) and *The Benny Goodman Story* (Valentine Davies, 1956), virtually all jazz films have followed the model of *Young Man with a Horn*. It hardly matters whether they are ‘genuine’ biopics, such as Sidney J. Furie’s *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) on Billie Holliday and Clint Eastwood’s *Bird* (1988) on Charlie Parker, fictitious but (more or less loosely) focused on real characters, like Dale Turner (based on Lester Young and Bud Powell) in Bernard Tavernier’s *Round Midnight* (1986) or Rick Martin in *Young Man with a Horn* (based on Bix

Beiderbecke), or is entirely fictional, such as Paul Newman's Ram Bowen in Martin Ritt's *Paris Blues* (1961), Bleek Gilliam in Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) or Emmet Ray in Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999): the pattern is much the same.<sup>iv</sup>

*Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue* thus follow a well-trodden path. The same can be said about both movies' female characters who, despite some moments of independence, generally fulfil the role of long-suffering but faithful and submissive love interest. In *Miles Ahead*, Davis's first wife Frances Taylor (Emayatzy Corinealdi) is mythologized as his life-long muse, with Miles (Don Cheadle) plagued with regret many years after their break-up (the movie is set in 1979; the couple finally divorced in 1968). By contrast, his third wife Cicely Tyson, who did actually nurse him back to health and helped him to perform again during their marriage from 1981 to 88, goes entirely unmentioned. This liberty is not entirely without justification, since in his autobiography Davis articulates the kind of regret that colours the movie, declaring: 'Frances was the best wife that I ever had and whoever gets her is a lucky motherfucker. I know that now, and I wish I had known that then.' (Davis and Troupe 1990, 282) Yet, he also says of Tyson that they 'had this real tight spiritual thing' (Davis and Troupe 1990, 330), detailing with evident affection and gratitude how she had looked after him, so cutting her out entirely does seem unjust.

In *Born to be Blue*, Carmen Ejogo's Elaine is a composite character – a common device particularly for female characters in biopics (Bingham 2010, 5) – determined to redeem the notoriously wayward Chet Baker. Although both movies are quite frank – even if ultimately exculpatory – about their protagonists' philandering and physical and emotional abuse of their partners, their conservative insistence on traditional monogamous, redemptive romance ranks among their most problematic features.

The representation of race is not entirely without problems either. Co-written and directed by the African-American Don Cheadle, who also stars in the lead role, it is difficult to fault *Miles Ahead* in this regard, but it is odd how the story is told from the perspective of the supposed *Rolling Stone* journalist Dave Braden (Ewan McGregor), who manages to coax Davis out of his isolation,

identified by Richard Brody (2016) as Eric Nisenson,<sup>v</sup> as if mainstream, predominantly white audiences could not be expected to relate directly with a black protagonist without a white intermediary. When it comes to *Born to be Blue*, its hero Chet Baker, after originally lionizing black jazz musicians, particularly Miles Davis, became more and more convinced that he was rejected on account of his race. In the movie, he keeps repeating the mantra 'Hello, Dizzy, hello, Miles. There's a little white cat on the West Coast gonna eat you up' to himself. This isn't explained, but, according to an oft-repeated piece of jazz lore, this is what Charlie Parker is supposed to have said to Davis and Gillespie after hearing Baker in Los Angeles and employing him as a sideman. As James Gavin (2011, 53) points out in his biography of Baker, which must have acted as the basis for the film, the only source for the quote is Baker himself, who was a pathological auto-mythologizer and as credible as any professional junkie. Although the movie does not endorse Baker's racism (at least in his later years), its studied objectivity, while interesting from an aesthetic perspective, is somewhat grating from a social one. If neither movie is quite unequivocal in its representation of race, it is Chazelle's films that have raised most concern. While the 'whitewashing' of jazz in *Whiplash* (Williams 2015; Brody 2014) could be seen as an implicit criticism of conservatoire culture, the reduction of African-American music to some kind of authenticating 'blackdrop' for the white and straight romance between musician and jazz aficionado Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) and actress Mia (Emma Stone) in *La La Land* (Madison III 2017; Calvario and Calvario 2016; Mirkinson 2017; Lott-Lavigna 2017) is harder to explain.

### Failing to Perform

It is worth dwelling a little more on the dramatic climax in *Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue*, when their protagonists find themselves unable to play their instruments. In *Miles Ahead*, this comes near the end, when Miles demonstrates his inability to play to the journalist Dave and Junior (Lakeith Stanfield), a rising trumpet star, in whom Miles sees a younger version of himself and who seems to

rekindle his creativity. At this point, we have seen and heard him play on numerous occasion, but all these scenes were in flashbacks – memories of his former glories before he went into (temporary) retirement. When he finally picks up his trumpet in the primary narrative time layer of the film, all he manages to produce are pathetic grunts and squeals.<sup>vi</sup> In the very next, closing scene, his embouchure is already magically restored, and he is seen and heard playing more powerfully and expressively than ever before. We must assume that months of laborious and painful practice occurred between the two scenes, but we are not allowed to witness this.

Chet Baker, in *Born to be Blue*, hits rock bottom much earlier, so that much of the film consists of the stubborn and gradual regaining of (some of) his former prowess, a form of rags-to-riches story compressed into a moment of crisis rather than covering a whole career. He had famously been the victim of a mugging, in which drug dealers he owed money knocked out his front teeth. We next see him in a bathtub valiantly trying to hold a note while blood is running from his ill-fitting dentures out of his mouth and over his body.

It is impossible not to be reminded of Krin Gabbard's discussion of the phallic symbolism of the trumpet and symbolic castration in jazz films, including *Young Man with a Horn* and, in particular, *Mo' Better Blues* (Spike Lee, 1990). As Gabbard (1996, 147) puts it, in these films 'a common scene occurs in which the player's inability to hit the right notes is a metaphor for his sexual or masculine inadequacy'. The parallels between the four movies (*Miles Ahead*, *Born to be Blue*, *Young Man with a Horn* and *Mo' Better Blues*), the way they all depict a very similar inexorable downward trajectory towards the dramatic (anti-)climax, before making a sudden reversal towards a happy or, in the case of *Born to be Blue*, ambiguous ending, are striking. What sets the new jazz films apart is overstatement: where Rick Martin and Bleek Gilliam fail to hit the right note, Miles and Chet don't manage to sustain any note at all. Indeed, *Born to be Blue* drives the sexual symbolism home none-too-subtly by including a scene cutting between footage of Baker painstakingly relearning to play and his partner Elaine teaching him how to make love for her with feeling and consideration. Although the two newer films are biographical in contradistinction to their fictional or semi-fictional



predecessors, the way in which they follow well-established models is unlikely to be entirely accidental.

### Jazz, Flashbacks and Nostalgia

Their formal and narrative quirks aside, then, the new jazz films are stereotypical of the genre, separated from their predecessors primarily through the passage of time. But there is one crucial difference. Most of the classic jazz films appeared at a time when jazz was still a vibrant cultural force. In terms of the relation between jazz films and the jazz culture they depicted, several phases can be distinguished: while the swing era showbiz films, such as *The Fabulous Dorseys*, *The Glen Miller Story* and *The Benny Goodman Story*, came near the end of an era in which jazz was a commercial, mass market, *Young Man with a Horn* inaugurated the modern jazz-musician-as-serious-artist faux-biopic. The film *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), starring a young Sidney Poitier and, even more influentially, Bill Haley & The Comets' hit 'Rock around the Clock', is often seen as a watershed, marking the ascendancy of rock 'n' roll and eclipse of jazz as a commercial music with youth appeal, epitomised in a scene during which teenagers trash a teacher's jazz record collection. To be sure, *Young Man with a Horn* precedes *Blackboard Jungle* by some five years, but there is a clear sense in the film that jazz has grown up and is vying for artistic (although not necessarily social) prestige, more than teenage fandom. Indeed, it can easily be argued that jazz could only be taken seriously once it had become a minority concern, seemingly requiring an educated taste and discernment and thus garnering cultural capital.

Later classics of the genre, such as *'Round Midnight*, *Bird*, *Kansas City* (Robert Altman, 1996) and *Sweet and Lowdown*, appeared after jazz's heyday and, in contradistinction to *Young Man with a Horn* or, for that matter, *Paris Blues*, were all set in the past. For a classic biopic, such as *Bird*, this may seem obvious and is part and parcel to jazz's having come of age. It's notable, though, that *'Round Midnight*, too, is set in the 1950s, some 30s years before the film's production, and in its

lugubrious atmosphere a yearning for a supposed golden age is unmistakeable. *Kansas City* and *Sweet and Lowdown* are both set in the 1930s and 40s, but not necessarily primarily because of the music.

Nevertheless, all these films seemed to speak to then present concerns and to emanate from a society in which jazz played a vital role, even as a minority taste. They clearly trusted their audiences to share a culture in which jazz is understood and widely appreciated.

The same cannot be said about the new crop of jazz movies. They seem to hearken back to a bygone age, separated from the present by a gulf. *La La Land*, alone, is upfront about this. 'Jazz is dying', Sebastian proclaims in one scene, declaring his mission in life not to allow this to happen 'on [his] watch' – but he's clearly under no illusions. In a later scene he is challenged by Keith (John Legend), the leader of a successful band, who has offered him a lifeline:

Jazz is dying because of people like you. You're playing to 90-year-olds at The Lighthouse.

Where are the kids? Where are the young people? You're so obsessed with Kenny Clarke and Thelonious Monk. These guys were revolutionaries. How are you going to be a revolutionary if you're such a traditionalist? You're holding onto the past, but Jazz is about the future. (Cornish 2017)

Sebastian simply remains silent. In an interview, Chazelle has admitted that he identifies with him and his demand for 'purity', not Keith (Cornish 2017), and the whole movie suggests as much. It is an enormous nostalgia-fest, dedicated to the 'golden age' musical of the 1920s to 50s even more than to classic jazz (up to the 1960s). It seems fully aware that its position is untenable but gleefully indulges in contradictory golden-ageisms nonetheless (it never seriously attempts to blend the post-bop idiom of the diegetic jazz scenes with the show-tune pastiches of the song and dance numbers and underscore, for instance). Nor is there any sense that Chazelle expects his audience to understand and share his and Sebastian's enthusiasm: when, in one scene, Sebastian

‘mansplains’ jazz to Mia in the most simplistic and reductive terms, this is clearly intended to educate the audience as much as Mia.

*Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue* are not necessarily less conflicted but a good deal less self-aware. *Miles Ahead*, in particular, is characterised by a historical split consciousness that announces itself in the formal structure. As mentioned before, the movie is set in 1979, during Davis’s retreat from the stage and (save for some unissued recordings) the studio. It’s told in a double-flashback structure. The outer frame consists of an interview the fictional Miles gives to Dave Braden following his comeback, modelled apparently on one the real Davis had granted to Bryant Gumble on NBC’s *Late Show* in 1982,<sup>vii</sup> while the main narrative layer consists of the months leading up to this moment. Much of the story, however, is filled in through extensive flashbacks-within-the-flashback, which, crucially, include lengthy re-enactments of some of Davis’s most influential recordings, which are presented as Miles’s memories. The result is an odd contradiction between Miles’s frequent statements about the necessity for the music to move forward – including his disdain for the very word ‘jazz’, speaking instead of ‘social music’ – and his constant revelling in reveries about his former glory days. Almost needless to say, as audience members we are complicit in this: who doesn’t want to hear ‘So what?’, ‘Miles Ahead’, ‘Nefertiti’ and all the others, even if their performance is simply mimed to the original recording? We have come for the tunes, although we may stay for the story. As a result, jazz is doubly removed from the present: it takes place in a movie set almost forty years ago, where it already represents but the distant, unrepeatable memories of an ageing and ailing former star. To be fair, at the very end, the film keeps its promise and brings Miles’s music into the present – rather confusingly, *our* present, not that of the film. Miles is unveiling his new social music – the ‘fusion’ (literally) of jazz, rock and funk he created during the 1980s, lightly updated by the film’s composer, Robert Glasper. That the scene is set now, outside the diegesis of the film, can be seen in some details, such as the hashtag #socialmusic on Miles’s shirt (which was used by the film’s promotion company in their actual twitter feed) and the make of some of the instruments (notably the keyboard, which is a recent model). With the fictional

Miles are his real-life collaborators, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter (now in their seventies and eighties, respectively), whose younger selves we have seen earlier played by actors, and much younger jazz luminaries Esperanza Spalding, Gary Clark, Jr. and Antonio Sanchez. Over the end titles, we also hear the rapper Pharoahe Monch, further testifying to the continuity of black music (the 'changing same', in Amiri Baraka's (2002) words). The music, we are told, unites past, present and future; it transcends all boundaries of age, race and gender, even between fiction and reality. In other words: Miles lives! It is a marvellous scene and the attention it pays to today's music and musicians, young and old, sets the film apart from the others discussed here. Nevertheless, this closing scene, or rather *postlude*, cannot hide the fact that the rest of the film is dealing with ancient history and treating jazz as a relic of a long bygone era.

*Born to be Blue* relies less heavily on flashbacks as a formal device, since much of the narrative follows Baker relearning to play the trumpet after his encounter with the drug dealers, getting his first gigs and so forth in a linear manner. But there is one extended and crucial flashback early on in the film, showing Baker's seminal gig at Birdland, when he was billed above Miles Davis (during the first half of his month-long engagement, he was featured above the good-natured Dizzy Gillespie, without any recorded incidents). In the film, a putdown by Davis – 'come back when you've lived a little' – destroys Baker's self-confidence and is depicted as the motivating factor behind the whole drama: Baker's downward spiral into drug addiction and his pulling himself up by his bootstraps and steely determination to earn the respect of the jazz scene are linked to his rejection by his erstwhile idol. The model here appears to be the cymbal that, following an apocryphal story, Philly Joe Jones throws at Charlie Parker in Clint Eastwood's *Bird* and that makes repeated appearances at crucial junctures in the narrative. What exactly Davis may have said to Baker remains conjecture, but the main gist of the storyline of *Born to be Blue* is borne out by Gavin's biography: 'Long after most of the "brothers" had stopped caring, Baker felt the sting of their early rejection [at the time of his Birdland engagement], and he never stopped resenting them for it' (Gavin 2011, 99–100). In the end, the film goes full circle, closing on a comeback gig at Birdland (which never

happened), with Gillespie and Davis once again in attendance. Thus, even though the flashback takes up only a small part of the film – at least compared to the dominance of flashbacks in *Miles Ahead* – it could hardly be more crucial for the narrative. It is also set off from the remainder by being shot in black and white (a technical gimmick that *Miles Ahead* eschews, although it arguably might just as well have gone the whole hog, considering that the performance flashbacks feel sepia-tinted despite being shot in colour). After the flashback, Baker spends the rest of the film trying to recapture his former prowess and status (which is a curious gambit for a music film, since it means that the bulk of the film features only rudimentary music-making, bookended by more impressive performances at the two Birdland gigs).

As mentioned before, the flashback is a conventional device in biopics, used to focus the story on its dramatic core and avoid the tediousness of long stretches of linear, more or less eventful, narrative (*Bird* is virtually alone among jazz biopics in its reliance on linear narrative, instead using the flying cymbal leitmotif to structure the succession of events). Nevertheless, its use in *Miles Ahead* and, to a lesser extent, *Born to be Blue* accentuates historical distance. Jazz appears as a reminiscence from a bygone age, twice removed from the present: in films set in the past in which it is already evoked in sepia-tinted memories. Although *Miles Ahead* makes a valiant attempt at gesturing towards the present and future of jazz and *La La Land* at its preservation on life support in its ‘pure form’, on the whole these films are primarily interested in jazz as a historical relic, not as a living presence.

## Conclusion

While we may thus rejoice at seeing jazz being celebrated on the silver screen again after so many years, and while we may welcome that potential new audiences are being introduced to the music (although *Miles Ahead* and *Born to be Blue* are unlikely to attract many viewers who aren’t already jazz fans, *La La Land* – almost uniquely among jazz films – is a veritable blockbuster), the picture the

new crop of jazz films paint of jazz is ultimately far from flattering. Jazz is implicitly and partly unwittingly presented as a thing of the past. Although earlier jazz films were set in the past or were based on long-dead musicians, they gave the impression of a historical continuity between the past and the present. This is no longer the case: in the new jazz films, performance is largely relegated to nostalgic flashbacks or is being preserved in its dying but supposedly pure form. What these films are celebrating is jazz's afterlife, not its renaissance.

We may of course dispute this diagnosis; most of us can recite exciting musicians, albums and gigs, or name festivals, labels, clubs and broadcasters that keep the music alive and vibrant. But what cinema represents, usually accurately, are not facts but popular perception. And it is hard to disagree: jazz may thrive in its niches and will continue to do so for some time, but it is not widely popular and is not going to become so.<sup>viii</sup> Moreover, in most people's consciousness, it is associated squarely with the past – how many can name a single jazz musician who came to prominence after about 1970? We may look forward to more jazz films still, and there is no reason not to enjoy them while we can, but let's not kid ourselves what that means about the music's presence in popular consciousness and its cultural role.

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<sup>i</sup> I wish to thank my colleague Ian Garwood for his valuable comments on a draft version of this chapter.

<sup>ii</sup> Boundaries can be fluid and definitions are by their nature problematic, but for the purposes of this chapter the definition of 'jazz films' adopted by Jenny Doctor et al. (Doctor, Elsdon, and Heile 2016, 1) is valid: 'narrative feature films focusing on actual or imaginary jazz musicians ("biopics"), set in the jazz milieu, or at least using jazz as a soundtrack'. This can be contrasted to documentaries or concert footage.

<sup>iii</sup> It's worth pointing out that, although Brody (2014) is justified in criticizing the film's depiction of jazz, his apparent conviction that it completely endorses Fletcher's actions or otherwise shares the beliefs of its protagonists (including the lionization of Buddy Rich) is bewildering.

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<sup>iv</sup> Paul Newman's Ram Bowen in *Paris Blues* may be seen as an exception since he has no obvious vices – presumably because he eventually abandons jazz for classical composition – but he too is referred to as a 'night person' by his friend and musical partner Eddie Cook (Sidney Poitier), and he leaves his love interest Lilian Corning (Joanne Woodward) to focus entirely on his art.

<sup>v</sup> The identification of Braden as Nisenson is plausible, although it too does involve some license. Nisenson had met Davis a good deal earlier, and was actually supposed to ghost-write his autobiography. Davis split from him in 1982, when his second wife Cicely Tyson demanded a clean break with his past ('Eric Nisenson' 2016).

<sup>vi</sup> In his autobiography there is no indication that Davis was physically unable to play, although he states that 'from 1975 until early 1980 I didn't pick up my horn' and that he was in poor health – he actually had sickle cell anaemia, osteoarthritis and a number of other conditions, on top of his addictions to drugs and alcohol: Davis and Troupe 1990, 323; Carr 1984, 274–79. To be sure, after such a long period of inactivity his embouchure would have been poor, but he would have been able to play more or less normally, at least for brief periods. Another 'interesting' license the makers took is that they attribute his bad hip to a fight with his first wife Frances Taylor – implausibly started by her, moreover. It was in fact caused by osteoarthritis.

<sup>vii</sup> This is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHeYG9SNaS0> (accessed 22 Jan. 17). His rejection of the term 'jazz' and preference for 'social music' can be found here word for word.

<sup>viii</sup> The figures, at least, are clear. According to the *Nielsen Music Year End Report US 2016*, jazz ties with classical as least popular genre in the USA, accounting for 1% of music consumption:

<http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/2017-reports/2016-year-end-music-report-us.pdf> (accessed 23 January 2017).